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The Approach to Mysticism

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

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The Approach to Mysticism

MYSTICISM is not only a science but also, and in a greater degree, an art. To approach it merely as a science, as the modern mind attempts to do, is to move towards futility, if not to land in positive disaster. Sufficient stress is not laid on this aspect of the matter, although the very crux of the situation lies here. The mystic domain has to be apprehended not merely by the true mind and understanding but by the right temperament and character. Mysticism is not merely an object of knowledge, a problem for enquiry and solution, it is an end, an ideal that has to be achieved, a life that has to be lived. The mystics themselves have declared long ago with no uncertain or faltering voice: this cannot be attained by intelligence or much learning, it can be seized only by a purified and clear temperament.

The warning seems to have fallen, in the modern age, on unheeding ears. For the

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modern mind, being pre-eminently and uncompromisingly scientific, can entertain no doubt as to the perfect competency of science and the scientific method to seize and unveil any secret of Nature. If, it is argued, mysticism *is* a secret, if there is at all a truth and reality in it, then it is and must be amenable to the rules and regulations of science; for science is *the* revealer of Nature's secrecies.

But what is not recognised in this view of things is that there are secrecies and secrecies. The material secrecies of Nature are of one category, the mystic secrecies are of another. The two are not only disparate but incommensurable. Any man with a mind and understanding of average culture can see and handle the 'scientific' forces, but not the mystic forces. A scientist once thought that he had clinched the issue and cut the gordian knot when he declared triumphantly with reference to spirit seances: "Very significant is the fact that spirits appear only in closed chambers, in half obscurity, to somnolent minds; they are nowhere in the open air, in broad daylight to the wide awake and vigilant intellect!" Well, if the

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fact is as it is stated, what does it prove? Night alone reveals the stars, during the day they vanish, but that is no proof that stars are not existent. Rather the true scientific spirit should seek to know why (or how) it is so, if it is so, and such a fact would exactly serve as a pointer, a significant starting ground. The attitude of the jesting Pilate is not helpful even to scientific enquiry. This matter of the Spirits we have taken only as an illustration and it must not be understood that this is a domain of high mysticism; rather the contrary. The spiritualists' approach to Mysticism is not the right one and is fraught with not only errors but dangers. For the spiritualists approach their subject with the entire scientific apparatus—the only difference being that the scientist does not believe while the spiritualist believes.

Mystic realities cannot be reached by the scientific consciousness, because they are far more subtle than the subtlest object that science can contemplate. The neutrons and positrons are for science today the finest and profoundest object-forces; they belong, it is said, almost to a borderland where physics

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ends. Nor for that reason is a mystic reality something like a mathematical abstraction, $\sqrt{-n}$ for example. The mystic reality is subtler than the subtlest of physical things and yet, paradoxical to say, more concrete than the most concrete thing that the senses apprehend.

Furthermore, being so, the mystic domain is of infinitely greater potency than the domain of intra-atomic forces. If one comes, all on a sudden, into contact with a force here without the necessary preparation to hold and handle it, he may get seriously bruised, morally and physically. The adventure into the mystic domain has its own toll of casualties—one can lose the mind, one can lose one's body even and it is a very common experience among those who have tried the path. It is not in vain and merely as a poetic metaphor that the ancient seers have said

*Kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā **

or *nāyamātmā balahinena labhyaḥ. †*

* “Sharp as a razor's edge, difficult of going, hard to traverse is that path!”

† “This spirit is a thing no weakling can gain.”

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The mystic forces are not only of immense potency but of a definite moral disposition and character, that is to say, they are of immense potency either for good or for evil. They are not mechanical and *a-moral* forces like those that physical sciences deal with; they are forces of consciousness and they are conscious forces, they act with an aim and a purpose. The mystic forces are forces either of light or of darkness, either Divine or Titanic. And it is most often the powers of darkness that the naturally ignorant consciousness of man contacts when it seeks to cross the borderline without training or guidance, by the sheer arrogant self-sufficiency of mental scientific reason.

Ignorance, certainly, is not man's ideal condition—it leads to death and dissolution. But knowledge also can be equally disastrous if it is not of the right kind. The knowledge that is born of spiritual disobedience, inspired by the Dark ones, leads to the soul's fall and its calvary through pain and suffering on earth. The seeker of true enlightenment has got to make a distinction, learn to separate the true and the right from the false and the

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wrong, unmask the luring *Māra*, say clearly and unfalteringly to the dark light of Lucifer — *apage Satana*, if he is to come out into the true light and command the right forces. The search for knowledge alone, knowledge for the sake of knowledge, the path of pure scientific enquiry and inquisitiveness, in relation to the mystic world, is a dangerous thing. For such a spirit serves only to encourage and enhance man's arrogance and in the end not only limits but warps and falsifies the knowledge itself. A knowledge based on and secured exclusively through the reason and mental light can go only so far as that faculty can be reasonably stretched and not infinitely—to stretch it to infinity means to snap it. This is the warning that Yajna-*valkya* gave to Gargi when the latter started renewing her question *ad infinitum*: Yajna-*valkya* said, "If you do not stop, your head will fall off."

II

The mystic truth has to be approached through the heart. "In the heart is established the Truth," says the Upanishad : it is

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there that is seated eternally the soul, the real being, who appears no bigger than the thumb. Even if the mind is utilised as an instrument of knowledge, the heart must be there behind as the guide and inspiration. It is precisely because, as I have just mentioned, Gargi sought to shoot up—like “vaulting ambition that o’erleaps itself” of which Shakespeare speaks—through the mind alone to the highest truth that Yajnavalkya had to pull her up and give the warning that she risked losing her head if she persisted in her questioning endlessly.

For true knowledge comes of, and means, identity of being. All other knowledge may be an apprehension of things but not comprehension. In the former, the knower stands apart from the object and so can envisage only the outskirts, the contour, the surface nature; the mind is capable of this alone. But comprehension means an embracing and penetration which is possible when the knower identifies himself with the object. And when we are so identified we not merely know the object, but becoming it in our consciousness, we love it and live it.

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The mystic's knowledge is a part and a formation of his life. That is why it is a knowledge not abstract and remote but living and intimate and concrete. It is a knowledge that pulsates with delight : indeed it is the radiance that is shed by the purest and intensest joy. For this reason it may be that in approaching through the heart there is a chance of one's getting arrested there and not caring for the still higher, the solar lights ; but this need not be so. In the heart there is a golden door leading to the deepest delights, but there is also a diamond door opening up into the skies of the brightest luminosities.

For it must be understood that the heart, the mystic heart, is not the external thing which is the seat of emotion or passion ; it is the secret heart that is behind, the inner heart—*antarhr̥daya* of the Upanishad—which is the centre of the individual consciousness, where all the divergent lines of that consciousness meet and from where they take their rise. That is what the Upanishad means when it says that the heart has a hundred channels which feed the human

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vehicle. That is the source, the fount and origin, the very substance of the true personality. Mystic knowledge—the true mystic knowledge which saves and fulfils—begins with the awakening or the entrance into this real being. This being is pure and luminous and blissful and sovereignly real, because it is a portion, a spark of the Divine Consciousness and Nature: a contact and communion with it brings automatically into play the light and the truth that are its substance. At the same time it is an uprising flame that reaches out naturally to higher domains of consciousness and manifests them through its translucid dynamism.

The knowledge that is obtained without the heart's instrumentation or co-operation is liable to be what the Gita describes as Asuric. First of all, from the point of view of knowledge itself, it would be, as I have already said, ego-centric, a product and agent of one's limited and isolated self, easily put at the service of desire and passion. This knowledge, whether rationalistic or occult, is, as it were, hard and dry in its constitution, and oftener than not, negative and destructive—withering

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and blasting in its career like the desert simoom.

There are modes of knowledge that are occult—and to that extent mystic—and can be mastered by practices in which the heart has no share. But they have not the saving grace that comes by the touch of the Divine. They are not truly mystic—the truly mystic belongs to the ultimate realities, the deepest and the highest,—they, on the other hand, are transverse and tangential movements belonging to an intermediate region where light and obscurity are mixed up and even for the greater part the light is swallowed up in the obscurity or utilised by it.

The mystic's knowledge and experience is not only true and real: it is delightful and blissful. It has a supremely healing virtue. It brings a sovereign freedom and ease and peace to the mystic himself, but also to those around him, who come in contact with him. For truth and reality are made up of love and harmony, because truth is, in its essence, unity.

II

Mystic Symbolism

THE Mystics all over the world and in all ages have clothed their sayings in proverbs and parables, in figures and symbols. To speak in symbols seems to be in their very nature; it is their characteristic manner, their inevitable style. Let us see what is the reason behind it. But first who are the Msytics? They are those who are in touch with supra-sensual things, whose experiences are of a world different from the common physical world, the world of the mind and the senses.

These other worlds are constituted in other ways than ours. Their contents are different and the laws that obtain there are also different. It would be a gross blunder to attempt a chart of any of these other systems, to use an Einsteinian term, with the measures and conventions of the system to which our external waking consciousness belongs. For, there "the sun shines not, nor

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the moon, nor the stars, neither these lightnings nor this fire.” The difficulty is further enhanced by the fact that there are very many unseen worlds and they all differ from the seen and from one another in manner and degree. Thus, for example, the Upanishads speak of the *svapna*, the *susupta*, and the *turīya*, domains beyond the *jāgrat* which is that where the rational being with its mind and senses lives and moves. And there are other systems and other ways in which systems exist, and they are practically innumerable.

If, however, we have to speak of these other worlds, then, since we can speak only in the terms of this world, we have to use them in a different sense from those they usually bear; we must employ them as figures and symbols. Even then they may prove inadequate and misleading; so there are Mystics who are averse to all speech and expression—they are *mauni*; in silence they experience the inexpressible and in silence they communicate it to the few who have the capacity to receive in silence.

But those who do speak, how do they

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choose their figures and symbols? What is their methodology? For it might be said, since the unseen and the seen differ out and out, it does not matter what forms or signs are taken from the latter; for any meaning and significance could be put into anything. But in reality, it does not so happen. For, although there is a great divergence between figures and symbols on the one hand and the things figured and symbolised on the other, still there is also some link, some common measure. And that is why we see not unoften the same or similar figures and symbols representing an identical experience in ages and countries far apart from each other.

We can make a distinction here between two types of expression which we have put together indiscriminately, figures and symbols. Figures, we may say, are those that are constructed by the rational mind, the intellect; they are mere metaphors and similes and are not organically related to the thing experienced, but put round it as a robe that can be dropped or changed without affecting the experience itself. Thus, for example, when the Upanishad says, *ātmānam*

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rathinam viddhi (Know that the soul is the master of the chariot who sits within it) or *indriyaṇi hayānāhuḥ* (The senses, they say, are the horses), we have here only a comparison or analogy that is common and natural to the poetic manner. The particular figure or simile used is not inevitable to the idea or experience that it seeks to express, its part and parcel. On the other hand, take this Upanishadic perception: *hiranyamayen patreṇa satyasyāphitam mukham*. (The face of the Truth lies hidden under the golden orb). Here the symbol is not mere analogy or comparison, a figure; it is one with the very substance of the experience—the two cannot be separated. Or when the Vedas speak of the kindling of the Fire, the rushing of the waters or the rise of the Dawn, the images, though taken from the material world, are not used for the sake of mere comparison, but they are the embodiments, the living forms of truths experienced in another world.

When a Mystic refers to the Solar Light or to the Fire—the light, for example, that struck down Saul and transformed him into

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Saint Paul or the burning bush that visited Moses, it is not the physical or material object that he means and yet it is that in a way. It is the materialization of something that is fundamentally not material: some movement in an inner consciousness precipitates itself into the region of the senses and takes from out of the material the form commensurable with its nature that it finds there.

And there is such a commensurability or parallelism between the various levels of consciousness, in and through all the differences that separate them from one another. Thus an object or a movement apprehended on the physical plane has a sort of line of re-echoing images extended in a series along the whole gradation of the inner planes; otherwise viewed, an object or movement in the innermost consciousness translates itself in varying modes from plane to plane down to the most material, where it appears in its grossest form as a concrete three-dimensional object or a mechanical movement. This parallelism or commensurability by virtue of which the different and divergent states of consciousness can portray or represent each

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other is the source of all symbolism.

A symbol symbolizes something for this reason that both possess in common a certain identical, at least similar, quality or rhythm or vibration, the symbol possessing it in a grosser or more apparent or sensuous form than the thing symbolized does. Sometimes it may happen that it is more than a certain quality or rhythm or vibration that is common between the two: the symbol in its entirety is the thing symbolized but thrown down on another plane, it is the embodiment of the latter in a more concrete world. The light and the fire that Saint Paul and Moses saw appear to be of this kind.

Thus there is a great diversity of symbols. At the one end is the mere metaphor or simile or allegory ('figure,' as we have called it) and at the other end is the symbol identical with the thing symbolized. And upon this inner character of the symbol depends also to a large extent its range and scope. There are symbols which are universal and intimately ingrained in the human consciousness itself. Mankind has used them in all ages and climes almost in the same sense

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and significance. There are others that are limited to peoples and ages. They are made out of forms that are of local and temporal interest and importance. Their significances vary according to time and place. Finally, there are symbols which are true of the individual consciousness only; they depend on personal peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, on one's environment and upbringing and education.

Man being an embodied soul, his external consciousness (what the Upanishad calls *jāgrat*) is the *milieu* in which his soul experiences naturally manifest and find their play. It is the forms and movements of that consciousness which clothe and give a concrete habitation and name to perceptions on the subtler ranges of the inner existence. If the experiences on these planes are to be presented to the conscious memory and to the brain-mind and made communicable to others through speech, this is the inevitable and natural process. Symbols are a translation in mental and sensual (and vocal) terms of experiences that are beyond the mind and the sense and the speech and yet throw a kind of echoing vibrations upon these lesser levels.

III

Upanishadic Symbolism

A certain rationalistic critic divides the Upanishadic symbols into three categories—those that are rational and can be easily understood by the mind ; those that are not understood by the mind and yet do not go against reason, having nothing inherently irrational in them and may be simply called non-rational ; those that seem to be quite irrational, for they go frankly against all canons of logic and common sense. As an example of the last, the irrational type, the critic cites a story from the *Chhandogya*, which may be rendered thus :

There was an aspirant, a student who was seeking after knowledge. One day there appeared to him a white dog. Soon, other dogs followed and addressed their predecessor : “ O Lord, sing to our Food, for we desire to eat.” The white dog answered, “ Come to me at dawn here in this very place.” The aspirant waited. The dogs, like singer-priests,

circled round in a ring. Then they sat and cried aloud ; they cried out, “ *Om* we eat and *Om* we drink, may the gods bring here our food.”

Now, before any explanation is attempted it is important to bear in mind that the Upanishads speak of things experienced—not merely thought, reasoned or argued and that these experiences belong to a world and consciousness other than that of the mind and the senses. One should naturally expect here a different language and mode of expression than that which is appropriate to mental and physical things. For example, the world of dreams was once supposed to be a sheer chaos, a mass of meaningless confusion ; but now it is held to be quite otherwise. Psychological scientists have discovered a method—even a very well-defined and strict method—in the madness of that domain. It is an ordered, organised, significant world ; but its terminology has to be understood, its code deciphered. It is not a jargon, but a foreign language that must be learnt and mastered.

In the same way, the world of spiritual experiences is also something methodical,

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well-organized, significant. It may not be and is not the rational world of the mind and the sense; but it need not, for that reason, be devoid of meaning, mere fancifulness or a child's imagination running riot. Here also the right key has to be found, the grammar and vocabulary of that language mastered. And as the best way to have complete mastery of a language is to live among the people who speak it, so, in the matter of spiritual language, the best and the only way to learn it is to go and live in its native country.

Now, as regards the interpretation of the story cited, should not a suspicion arise naturally at the very outset that the dog of the story is not a dog but represents something else? First, a significant epithet is given to it—*white*; secondly, although it asks for food, it says that *Om* is its food and *Om* is its drink. In the Vedas we have some references to dogs. Yama has twin dogs that “guard the path and have powerful vision.” They are his messengers, “they move widely and delight in power and possess the vast strength.” The Vedic Rishis pray to them for Power and Bliss and for the vision of the Sun (Rig Veda,

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x.14-II, 12). There is also the Hound of Heaven, Sarama, who comes down and discovers the luminous cows stolen and hidden by the Panis in their dark caves; she is the path-finder for Indra, the deliverer.

My suggestion is that the dog is a symbol of the keen sight of Intuition, the un-failing perception of direct knowledge. With this clue the Upanishadic story becomes quite sensible and clear and not mere abracadabra. To the aspirant for Knowledge came first a purified power of direct understanding, an Intuition of fundamental value, and this brought others of the same species in its train. They were all linked together organically—that is the significance of the circle, and formed a rhythmic utterance and expression of the supreme truth (Om). It is also to be noted that they came and met at dawn to chant the Truth. Dawn is the opening and awakening of the consciousness to truths that come from above and beyond.

It may be asked why the dog has been chosen as the symbol of Intuition. In the Vedas, the cow and the horse also play a large part; even the donkey and the frog.

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have their own assigned roles. These objects are taken from the environment of ordinary life, and are those that are most familiar to the external consciousness, through which the inner experiences have to express themselves, if they are to be expressed at all. These material objects represent various kinds of forces and movements and subtle and occult and spiritual dynamisms. Strictly speaking, however, symbols are not *chosen* in a subtle or spiritual experience, that is to say, they are not arbitrarily selected and constructed by the conscious intelligence. They form part of a dramatization (to use a term of the Freudian psychology of dreams), a psychological alchemy, whose method and process and rationale are very obscure, which can be penetrated only by the vision of a third eye.

I

THE SEVERAL LIGHTS

The *Bṛihadaranyaka* speaks of several lights that man possesses, one in the absence of another, for his illumination and guidance.

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First of all, he has the Sun ; it is the primary light by which he lives and moves. When the Sun sets, the Moon rises to replace it. When both the Sun and the Moon set, he has recourse to the Fire. And when the Fire, too, is extinguished, there comes the Word. In the end, when the Fire is quieted and the Word silenced, man is lighted by the Light of the Atman. This Atman is All-Knowledge, it is secreted within the life, within the heart : it is self-luminous—*vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu hṛdyantarjyotiḥ*.

The progression indicated by the order of succession points to a gradual withdrawal from the outer to the inner light, from the surface to the deep, from the obvious to the secret, from the actual and derivative to the real and original. We begin by the senses and move towards the Spirit.

The Sun is the first and the most immediate source of light that man has and needs. He is the presiding deity of our waking consciousness and has his seat in the eye—*cakṣusaḥ ādityaḥ, ādityaḥ cakṣuḥ bhūtvā akṣinī prāviśat*. The eye is the representative of the senses ; it is the sense *par excellence*.

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In truth, sense-perception is the initial light with which we have to guide us, it is the light with which we start on the way. A developed stage comes when the Sun sets for us, that is to say, when we retire from the senses and rise into the mind, whose divinity is the Moon. It is the mental knowledge, the light of reason and intelligence, of reflection and imagination that govern our consciousness. We have to proceed farther and get beyond the mind, exceed the derivative light of the Moon. So when the Moon sets, the Fire is kindled. It is the light of the ardent and aspiring heart, the glow of an inner urge, the instincts and inspirations of our secret life-will. Here we come into touch with a source of knowledge and realization, a guidance more direct than the mind and much deeper than the sense-perception. Still this light partakes more of heat than of pure luminosity ; it is, one may say, incandescent feeling, but not vision. We must probe deeper, mount higher—reach heights and profundities that are serene and transparent. The Fire is to be quieted and silenced, says the Upanishad. Then we come nearer, to the

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immediate vicinity of the Truth: an inner hearing opens, the direct voice of Truth—the Word—reaches us to lead and guide. Even so, however, we have not come to the end of our journey; the Word of revelation is not the ultimate Light. The Word too is a clothing, though a luminous clothing—*hiraṇmayam pātram*. When this last veil dissolves and disappears, when utter silence, absolute calm and quietude reign in the entire consciousness, when no other lights trouble or distract our attention, there appears the Atman in its own body; we stand face to face with the source of all lights, the self of the Light, the light of the Self. We are that Light and we become that Light.

II

THE FOUR OBLATIONS

“The Word has four breasts. The Gods feed on two, SWAHAKAR and VASHATKAR, men upon the third, HANTAKAR, and the Ancestor upon the fourth, SWADHA”. — (BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD. V. 8. 1.)

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Ritualistically these four terms are the formulæ for oblation to four Deities, Powers or Presences, whom the sacrificer wishes to please and propitiate in order to have their help and blessing and in order thereby to discharge his dharma or duty of life. *Svāhā* is the offering especially dedicated to Agni, the foremost of the Gods, for he is the divine messenger who carries men's offering to the Gods and brings their blessing to men. *Vasatkār* is the offering to the Gods generally. *Hantakār* is the offering to mankind, to our kin, an especial form of it being the worship of the guests, *sarvadevamayo'tithi*. *Svadhā* is the offering to the departed Fathers (Pitris).

The duty of life consists, it is said, in the repaying of three debts which every man contracts as soon as he takes birth upon earth—the debt to the Gods, to Men and to the Ancestors. This threefold debt or duty has, in other terms, reference to the three fields or domains wherein an embodied being lives and moves and to which he must adjust and react rightly if he is to secure for his life an integral fulfilment. These are the

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family, society and the world and beyond-world. The Gods are the Powers that rule the world and beyond, they are the forms and forces of the One Spirit underlying the universe, the varied expressions of divine Truth and Reality. To worship the Gods, to do one's duty by them, means to come into contact and to be united—in being, consciousness and activity—with the universal and spiritual existence, which is the supreme end and purpose of human life. The second—a more circumscribed field—is the society to which one belongs, the particular group of humanity in which he functions as a limb. The service to society or good citizenship entails the worship of humanity, of Man as a god. Lastly, man belongs to the family, which is the unit of society; and the backbone of the family is the continuous line of ancestors, who are its presiding deity and represent the norm of a living dharma, the ethic of an ideal life.

From the psychological stand-point, the four oblations are movements or reactions of consciousness in its urge towards the utterance and expression of Divine Truth. Like

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some other elements in the cosmic play, these also from a quartet—*caturvyūha*—and work together for a common purpose in view of a perfect and all-round result.

Svāhā is the offering and invocation. One must dedicate everything to the Divine, cast all one has or does into the Fire of Aspiration that blazes up towards the Most High, and through the tongue of that one-pointed flame call on the Divinity.

In doing so, in invoking the Truth and consecrating oneself to it, one begins to ascend to it step by step; and each step means a tearing of another veil and a further opening of the passage. This graded mounting is *vaśatkāra*.

Hantakāra is the appearance, the manifestation of the Divinity—that which makes the worshipper cry in delight, “Hail!” It is the coming of the Dawn—*ahanā*—when the night has been traversed and the lid rent open, the appearance of the Divine to a human vision for the human consciousness to seize, almost in a human form.

Finally, once the Truth is reached, it is to be held fast, firmly established, embodied

and fixed in its inherent nature here in life and the waking consciousness. This is *Svadhā*.

The Gods feed upon *Svāhā* and *Vaṣaṭ*, as these represent the ascending movement of human consciousness: it is man's self-giving and aspiration and the upward urge of his heart and soul that reach to the Gods, and it is that which the immortals take into themselves and are, as it were, nourished by, since it is something that appertains to their own nature.

And in response they descend and approach and enter into the aspiring human soul—this descent and revelation and near and concrete presence of Divinity, this *Hanta* is man's food; for by it his consciousness is nourished.

This interchange, or mutual giving, the High Covenant between the Gods and Men, to which the Gita too refers—

“With this sacrifice nourish the Gods, that the Gods may nourish you; thus mutually nourishing ye shall obtain the highest felicity” (III-2)

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is the very secret of the cosmic play, the basis of the spiritual evolution in the universal existence.

The Gods are the formations or particularisations of the Truth-consciousness, the multiple individualisations of the One spirit. The Pitris are the Divine Fathers, that is to say, souls that once laboured and realised here below, and now have passed beyond. They dwell in another world, not too far removed from the earth, and from there, with the force of their realisation, lend a more concrete help and guidance to the destiny that is being worked out upon earth. They are forces and formations of consciousness in an intermediate region between Here and There (*antarikṣa*), and serve to bring men and gods nearer to each other, inasmuch as they belong to both the categories, being a divinised humanity or a humanised divinity. Each fixation of the Truth-consciousness in an earthly mould is a thing of joy to the Pitris; it is the *Svadhā* or food by which they live and grow, for it is the consolidation and also the resultant of their own realisation. The achievements of the sons are more easily

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and securely reared and grounded upon those of the forefathers, whose formative powers we have to invoke, so that we may pass on to the realisation, the firm embodiment of higher and greater destinies.

III

THE PATH OF THE FATHERS AND THE PATH OF THE GODS

One is an ideal in and of the world, the other is an ideal transcending the world. The Path of the Fathers (*Pitryāna*) enjoins the right accomplishing of the *dharma* of Life—it is the path of works, of Karma; it is the line of progressive evolution that man follows through the experience of life after life on earth. The Path of the Gods (*Devayāna*) runs above life's evolutionary course; it lifts man out of the terrestrial cycle and places him in a superior consciousness—it is the path of knowledge, of Vidya.* The Path of the Fathers is the soul's southern or inferior orbit (*dakṣiṇāyana*, *aparārdha*); the

**Karmaṇā pitrloko vidyayā devalokaḥ (jāyāḥ)*
—*Bṛihadaranyaka* 1.5.16.

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Path of the Gods is the northern or superior orbit (*uttarāyana*, *parārdha*). The former is also called the Lunar Path and the latter the Solar Path.* For the moon represents the mind,† and is therefore, an emblem that befits man so long as he is a mental being and pursues a dharma that is limited by the mind; the sun, on the other hand, is the knowledge and consciousness that is beyond the mind—it is the eye of the Gods.‡

Man has two aspects or natures; he dwells in two worlds. The first is the manifest world—the world of the body, the life and the mind. The body has flowered into the mind through the life. The body gives the basis or the material, the life gives power and energy and the mind the directing knowledge. This triune world forms the humanity of man. But there is another aspect hidden behind this apparent nature, there is another world where man dwells in his submerged, larger and higher consciousness. To that

**Devalokādādityam . . pīṭhlokāccandram—Bṛihadara-nyaka VI 2.15.16.*

† *Cāndram mano bhūtvā — Aitareya I.2.4; Manasascandramāḥ Ibid. I.1.4.*

‡ *Divīva cakṣurātataṁ—Rigveda*

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his soul—the Puruṣha in his heart only has access. It is the world where man's nature is transmuted into another triune reality—Sat, Chit and Ananda.

The one, however, is not completely divorced from the other. The apparent, the inferior nature is only a preparation for the real, the superior nature. The Path of the Fathers concerns itself with man as a mental being and seeks so to ordain and accomplish its duties and ideals as to lead him on to the Path of the Gods; the mind, the life, and the body consciousness should be so disciplined, educated, purified, they should develop along such a line and gradually rise to such a stage as to make them fit to receive the light which belongs to the higher level, so allowing the human soul embedded in them to extricate itself and pass on to the Immortal Life.

And they who are thus lifted up into the Higher Orbit are freed from the bondage to the cycle of rebirth. They enjoy the supreme Liberation that is of the Spirit; and even when they descend into the Inferior Path, it is to work out as free agents, as vehicles of the Divine, a special purpose, to

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bring down something of the substance and nature of the Solar reality into the lower world, enlighten and elevate the lower, as far as it is allowed, into the higher.

IV

THE TRIPLE AGNI

Agni is the divine spark in man, the flaming consciousness in the mortal which purifies and uplifts (*pāvaka*) mortality into immortality. It is the god "seated in the secret heart, who is the possession of infinity and the foundation of existence," as Yama says to Nachiketas.*

Indeed, it was to this godhead that Nachiketas turned and he wanted to know of it and find it, when faith seized on his pure heart and he aspired for the higher spiritual life. The very opening hymn of Rigveda, too, is addressed to Agni, who is invoked as the vicar seated in the front of the sacrifice, the giver of the supreme gifts.

King Yama initiated Nachiketas into the mystery of Fire Worship and spoke of three

* *Katha I.1.14*

fires that have to be kindled if one aspires to enter the heaven of immortality.

The three fires are named elsewhere Garhapatya, Dakshina, and Ahavaniya.* They are the three tongues of the one central Agni, that dwells secreted in the hearth of the soul. They manifest as aspirations that flame up from the three fundamental levels of our being, the body, the life and the mind. For although the spiritual consciousness is the natural element of the soul and is gained in and through the soul, yet, in order that man may take possession of it and dwell in it consciously, in order that the soul's empire may be established, the external being too must respond to the soul's impact and yearn for its truth in the Spirit. The mind, the life and the body which are usually obstructions in the path, must discover the secret flame that is in them too—each has his own portion of the Soul's Fire—and mount on its ardent tongue towards the heights of the Spirit.

Garhapatya is the Fire in the body-consciousness. the fire of Earth, as it is some-

* *Chhandyogya*, IV. 11, 12, 13; V. 18. 2

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times called; Dakshinā is the Fire of the moon or mind, and Ahavaniya that of life.* The earthly fire is also the fire of the sun; the sun is the source of all earth's heat and symbolises at the same time the spiritual light manifested in the physical consciousness. The lunar fire is also the fire of the stars, the stars, mythologically, being the consorts or powers of the moon and they symbolise, in Yogic experience, the intuitive thoughts. The fire of the life-force has its symbol in lightning, electric energy being its vehicle.

Agni in the physical consciousness is called *gr̥hapati*, for the body is the house in which the soul is lodged and he is its keeper, guardian and lord. The fire in the mental consciousness is called *dakṣiṇā*; for it is that which gives discernment, the power to discriminate between the truth and the falsehood, it is that which by the pressure of its heat and light cleaves the wrong away from the right. And the fire in the life-force is called *āhavanīya*; for *prāṇa* is not only the plane of hunger and desire, but also of power and

* *Chhandyogya*, IV. 11, 12, 13; V. 18, 2

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dynamism, it is that which calls forth forces, brings them into play and it is that which is to be invoked for the progression of the Sacrifice, for an onward march on the spiritual path.

Of the three fires one is the upholder—he who gives the firm foundation, the stable house where the Sacrifice is performed and Truth realised; the second is the Knower, often called in the Veda *jātavedā*, who guides and directs; and the third the Doer, the effective Power, the driving Energy—*vaiśvānara*.

V

THE FIVE GREAT ELEMENTS

The five elements of the ancients—earth, water, fire, air and ether or space—are symbols taken from the physical world to represent other worlds that are in it and behind it. Each one is a principle that constitutes the fundamental nature of a particular plane of existence.

Earth represents the material world itself, Matter or existence in its most concrete, its grossest form. It is the basis of existence,

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the world that supports other worlds (*dhaxā*, *dharithrī*), the first or the lowest of the several ranges of creation. In man it is his body. The principle here is that of stability, substantiality, firmness, consistency.

Water represents the next rung—the vital world, the world of life-force (*prāṇa*). Physiologically also we know that water is the element forming three-fourths of the constituents of a living body and that dead and dry are synonymous terms ; it is the medium in which the living cells dwell and through which they draw their sustenance. Water is the veritable sap of life—it is the emblem of life itself. The principle it represents is that of movement, continuity, perpetuity.

Fire represents the Heart. It is that which gives the inner motive to the forces of life, it is the secret inspiration and aspiration that drive the movements of life. It is the heat of consciousness, the ardour of our central being that lives in the Truth and accepts nothing, nothing but the Truth. It is the pure and primal energy of our divine essence, driving ever upward and onward life's course of evolution.

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Air is mind, the world of thought, of conscious formation ; it is where life-movements are taken up and given a shape or articulate formula for an organised expression. The forms here have not, however, the concrete rigidity of Matter, but are pliant and variable and fluid—in fact, they are more in the nature of possibilities, rather than actualities. The Vedic Maruts are thought-gods; and Indra (the Luminous Mind), their king, is called the Fashioner of perfect forms.

Ether or Space is the infinitude of the Spirit, the limitless Presence that dwells in and yet transcends the body, the life, the heart and the mind.

VI

THE SCIENCE OF THE FIVE FIRES

The Science of the Five Agnis (Fires), as propounded by Pravahan, explains and illustrates the process of the birth of the body, the passage of the soul into earth existence. It describes the advent of the child, the building of the physical form of the human being. The process is conceived of

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as a sacrifice, the usual symbol with the Vedic Rishis for the expression of their vision and perception of universal processes of Nature, physical and psychological. Here, the child is said to be the final fruit of the sacrifice, the different stages in the process being: (i) Soma, (ii) Rain, (iii) Food, (iv) Semen, (v) Child. Soma means Rasa—physically the principle of water, psychologically the principle of delight—and symbolises and constitutes the very soul and substance of life. Now it is said that these five principles—the fundamental and constituent elements—are born out of the sacrifice, through the oblation or offering to the five Agnis. The first Agni is Heaven or the Sky-God, and by offering to it one's faith and one's ardent desire, one calls into manifestation Soma or Rasa or Water, the basic principle of life. This water is next offered to the second Agni, the Rain-God, who sends down Rain. Rain, again, is offered to the third Agni, the Earth, who brings forth Food. Food is, in its turn, offered to the fourth Agni, the Father or Male, who elaborates in himself the generating fluid. Finally, this

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fluid is offered to the fifth Agni, the Mother or the Female, who delivers the Child.

The biological process, described in what may seem to be crude and mediæval terms, really reflects or echoes a more subtle and psychological process. The images used form perhaps part of the current popular notion about the matter, but the esoteric sense goes beyond the outer symbols. The sky seems to be the far and tenuous region where the soul rests and awaits its next birth—it is the region of Soma, the *own Home* of Bliss and Immortality. Now when the time or call comes, the soul stirs and journeys down—that is the Rain. Next, it enters the earth atmosphere and clothes itself with the earth consciousness. Then it waits and calls for the formation of the material body, first by the contribution of the father and then by that of the mother; when these two unite and the material body is formed, the soul incarnates.

Apart from the question whether the biological phenomenon described is really a symbol and a cloak for another order of reality, and even taking it at its face value, what is

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to be noted here is the idea of a cosmic cycle, and a cosmic cycle that proceeds through the principle of sacrifice. If it is asked what there is wonderful or particularly spiritual in this rather *naïf* description of a very commonplace happening that gives it an honoured place in the *Upanishads*, the answer is that it is wonderful to see how the Upanishadic Rishi takes from an event its local, temporal and personal colour and incorporates it in a global movement, a cosmic cycle, as a limb of the Universal Brahman. The *Upanishads* contain passages which a puritanical mentality may perhaps describe as 'pornographic'; these have in fact been put by some on the *Index expurgatorius*. But the ancients saw these matters with other eyes and through another consciousness.

We have, in modern times, a movement towards a more conscious and courageous knowledge of things that were taboo to puritan ages. Not to shut one's eyes to the lower, darker and hidden strands of our nature, but to bring them out into the light of day and to face them is the best way of dealing with such elements, which otherwise, if they are

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repressed, exert an unhealthy influence on the mind and nature. The Upanishadhic view runs on the same lines, but, with the unveiling and the natural—and not merely naturalistic—delineation of these under-worlds (concerning sex and food), it endows them with a perspective *sub specie aeternitatis*. The sexual function, for example, is easily equated to the double movement of ascent and descent that is secreted in nature, or to the combined action of Purusha and Prakriti in the cosmic Play, or again to the hidden fount of Delight that holds and moves the universe. In this view there is nothing merely secular and profane, but all is woven into the cosmic spiritual whole; and man is taught to consider and to mould all his movements—of soul and mind and body—in the light and rhythm of that integral Reality.*

* The secularisation of man's vital functions in modern ages has not been a success. It has made him more egocentric and blatantly hedonistic. From an occult point of view he has in this way subjected himself to the influences of dark and undesirable world-forces, has made an opening, to use an Indian symbolism, for Kali (the Spirit of the Iron Age) to enter into him. The sex-force is an extremely potent agent, but it is extremely fluid and elusive and

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The central secret of the transfigured consciousness lies, as we have already indicated, in the mystic rite or law of Sacrifice. It is the one basic, fundamental, universal Law that upholds and explains the cosmic movement, conformity to which brings to the thrice-bound human being release and freedom. Sacrifice consists essentially of two elements or processes: (i) The offering or self-giving of the lower reality to the higher, and, as a consequence, an answering movement of (ii) the descent of the higher into the lower. The lower offered to the higher means the lower sublimated and integrated into the higher; and the descent of the higher into the lower means the incarnation of the former and the fulfilment of the latter. The *Gita* elaborates the same idea when it says that by Sacrifice men increase the gods and the gods

uncontrollable. It was for this reason that the ancients always sought to give it a proper mould, a right continent, a fixed and definite channel; the moderns, on the other hand, allow it to run free and play with it recklessly. The result has been, in the life of those born under such circumstances, a growing lack of poise and balance and a corresponding incidence of neurasthenia, hysteria and all abnormal pathological conditions.

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increase men and by so increasing each other they attain the supreme Good. Nothing is, nothing is done, for its own sake; for an ego-centric satisfaction; all, even movements relating to food and to sex should be dedicated to the Cosmic Being—Visva Purusha—and that alone received which comes from Him.

VII

THE COSMIC AND THE TRANSCENDENTAL

The Supreme Reality which is always called Brahman in the Upanishads, has to be known and experienced in two ways; for it has two fundamental aspects or modes of being. The Brahman is universal and it is transcendental. The Truth, *satyam*, the Upanishad says in its symbolic etymology, is 'This' (or, He) and 'That' (*syat+tyat* i.e. *sat+tat*). 'This' means the Universal Brahman: it is what is referred to when the Upanishad says: *Īśāvāsyamidam sarvam*: All this is for habitation by the Lord;

or, *Sarvam khalvidam brahma*: All this is indeed the Brahman;

or, *Sa evedam sarvam*: He is indeed all this;

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or, *Ahamevedam sarvam*: I am indeed all this ;

or, *Atmaivedam sarvam*: The Self indeed is all this ;

or again, *Sarvamasmi*: I am all.

The *Chhandogya** gives a whole typical scheme of this universal reality and explains how to realise it and what are the results of the experience. The Universal Brahman means the cosmic movement, the cyclic march of things and events taken in its global aspect. The typical movement that symbolises and epitomises the phenomenon, embodies the truth, is that of the sun. The movement consists of five stages which are called the five-fold *sāma*. *Sāma* means the equal Brahman that is ever present in all, the Upanishad itself says deriving the word from *sama*. It is *Sāma* also because it is a rhythmic movement, a cadence—a music of the spheres. And a rhythmic movement, in virtue of its being a wave, consists of these five stages: (i) the start, (ii) the rise, (iii) the peak, (iv) the decline and (v) the fall. Now the sun follows this curve and marks out the familiar

* *Chhandyogya*, II, III.

divisions of the day: dawn, forenoon, noon, afternoon and sunset. Sometimes two other stages are added, one at each end, one of preparation and another of final lapse—the twilights with regard to the sun—and then we have seven instead of five *sāmas*. Like the Sun, the Fire—that is to say, the sacrificial Fire—can also be seen in its fivefold cyclic movement: (i) the lighting, (ii) the smoke, (iii) the flame, (iv) smouldering and finally (v) extinction—the fuel as it is rubbed to produce the fire and the ashes may be added as the two supernumerary stages. Or again, we may take the cycle of five seasons or of the five worlds or of the deities that control these worlds. The living wealth of this earth is also symbolised in a quintette—goat and sheep and cattle and horse and finally man. Coming to the microcosm, we have in man the cycle of his five senses, basis of all knowledge and activity. For the macrocosm, to bring out its vast extra-human complexity, the Upanishad refers to a quintette, each term of which is again a trinity: (i) the threefold Veda, the Divine Word that is the origin of creation, (ii) the three worlds

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or fields—earth; air-belt or atmosphere and space, (iii) the three principles or deities ruling respectively these worlds—Fire, Air and Sun, (iv) their expressions, emanations or embodiments—stars and birds and light-rays, and finally, (v) the original inhabitants of these worlds—to earth belong the reptiles, to the mid-region the Gandharvas and to heaven the ancient Fathers.

Now, this is the All, the Universal. One has to realise it and possess in one's consciousness. And that can be done only in one way: one has to identify oneself with it, be one with it, become it. Thus by losing one's individuality one lives the life universal; the small lean separate life is enlarged and moulded in the rhythm of the Rich and the Vast. It is thus that man shares in the consciousness and energy that inspire and move and sustain the cosmos. The Upanishad most emphatically enjoins that one must not decry this cosmic godhead or deny any of its elements, not even such as are a taboo to the puritan mind. It is in and through an unimpaired global consciousness that one attains the All-Life and lives

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uninterruptedly and perennially: *Sarvamānveti jyok jīvati*.

Still the Upanishad says this is not the final end. There is yet a higher status of reality and consciousness to which one has to rise. For beyond the Cosmos lies the Transcendent. The Upanishad expresses this truth and experience in various symbols. The cosmic reality, we have seen, is often conceived as a septenary, a unity of seven elements, principles and worlds. Further to give it its full complex value, it is considered not as a simple septet, but a threefold heptade—the whole gamut, as it were, consisting of 21 notes or syllables. The Upanishad says, this number does not exhaust the entire range; for there is yet a 22nd place. This is the world beyond the Sun, griefless and deathless, the supreme Selfhood. The Veda also sometimes speaks of the integral reality as being represented by the number 100 which is 99+1; in other words, 99 represents the cosmic or universal, the unity being the reality beyond, the Transcendent.

Elsewhere the Upanishad describes more graphically this truth and the experience of

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it. It is said there that the sun has five—we note the familiar five—movements of rising and setting: (i) from East to West, (ii) from South to North, (iii) from West to East, (iv) from North to South and (v) from above—from the Zenith—downward. These are the five normal and apparent movements. But there is a sixth one; rather it is not a movement, but a status, where the sun neither rises nor sets, but is always visible fixed in the same position.

Some Western and Westernised scholars have tried to show that the phenomenon described here is an exclusively natural phenomenon, actually visible in the polar region where the sun never sets for six months and moves in a circle whose plane is parallel to the plane of the horizon on the summer solstice and is gradually inclined as the sun regresses towards the equinox (on which day just half the solar disc is visible above the horizon). The sun may be said there to move in the direction East-South-West-North and again East. Indeed the Upanishad mentions the positions of the sun in that order and gives a character to each successive station. The

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Ray from the East is red, symbolising the *Rik*, the Southern Ray is white, symbolising the *Yajur*, the Western Ray is black symbolising the *Atharva*. The natural phenomenon, however, might have been or might not have been before the mind's eye of the Rishi, but the symbolism, the esotericism of it is clear enough in the way the Rishi speaks of it. Also, apart from the first four movements. (which it is already sufficiently difficult to identify completely with what is visible,) the fifth movement, as a separate descending movement from above appears to be a foreign element in the context. And although, with regard to the sixth movement or status, the sun is visible as such exactly from the point of the North Pole for a while, the ring of the Rishi's utterance is unmistakably spiritual, it cannot but refer to a fact of inner consciousness—that is at least what the physical fact conveys to the Rishi and what he seeks to convey and express primarily.

Now this is what is sought to be conveyed and expressed. The five movements of the sun here also are nothing but the five *sāmas* and they refer to the cycle of the Cosmic or

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Universal Brahman. The sixth status where all movements cease, where there is no rising and setting, no ebb and flow, no waxing and waning, where there is the immutable, the ever-same unity, is very evidently the Transcendental Brahman. It is That to which the Vedic Rishi refers when he prays for a constant and fixed vision of the eternal Sun—*jyok ca sūryam dṛiṣe*.

It would be interesting to know what the five ranges or levels or movements of consciousness exactly are that make up the Universal Brahman described in this passage. It is the mystic knowledge, the Upanishad says, of the secret delight in things—*madhvidyā*. The five ranges are the five fundamental principles of delight—immortalities, the Veda would say—that form the inner core of the pyramid of creation. They form a rising tier and are ruled respectively by the gods—Agni, Indra, Varuna, Soma and Brahma—with their emanations and instrumental personalities—the Vasus, the Rudras, the Adityas, the Maruts and the Sadhyas. We suggest that these refer to the five well-known levels of being, the modes or nodi of con-

sciousness or something very much like them. The Upanishad speaks elsewhere of the five sheaths. The six Chakras of Tantric system lie in the same line. The first and the basic mode is the physical and the ascent from the physical: Agni and the Vasus are always intimately connected with the earth and the earth-principles (it can be compared with the Muladhara of the Tantras). Next, second in the line of ascent is the Vital, the centre of power and dynamism of which the Rudras are the deities and Indra the presiding God (*cf.* Swadhishthana of the Tantras—the navel centre): Indra, in the Vedas, has two aspects, one of knowledge and vision and the other of dynamic force and drive. In the first aspect he is more often considered as the Lord of the Mind, of the Luminous Mind. In the present passage, Indra is taken in his second aspect and instead of the Maruts with whom he is usually invoked has the Rudras as his agents and associates. The third in the line of ascension is the region of Varuna and the Adityas, that is to say, of the large Mind and its lights—perhaps it can be connected with Tantric Ajnachakra. The fourth is the domain of

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Soma and the Maruts—this seems to be the inner heart, the fount of delight and keen and sweeping aspirations—the Anahata of the Tantras. The fifth is the region of the crown of the head, the domain of Brahma and the Sadhyas: it is the Overmind status from where comes the descending inflatus, the creative Maya of Brahma. And when you go beyond, you pass into the ultimate status of the Sun, the reality absolute, the Transcendent which is indescribable, unseizable, indeterminate, indeterminable, incommensurable; and once there, one never returns, never—*na ca punarāvartate na ca punarāvartate*.

VIII

HOW MANY GODS ?

“How many Gods are there?” Yajnavalkya was once asked.¹ The Rishi answered, they say there are three thousand and three of them, or three hundred and three, or again, thirty-three; it may be said too there are six or three or two or one and a half or one finally. Indeed as the Upanishad says

¹ *Bṛihadaranyaka* III.9.

elsewhere, it is the One Unique who wished to be many: and all the gods are the various glories (*mahimā*) or emanations of the One Divine. The ancient of ancient Rishis had declared long long ago, in the earliest Veda, that there is one indivisible Reality, the seers name it in various ways.

In Yajnavalkya's enumeration, however, it is to be noted, first of all, that he stresses on the number three. The principle of triplicity is of very wide application: it permeates all fields of consciousness and is evidently based upon a fundamental fact of reality. It seems to embody a truth of synthesis and comprehension, points to the order and harmony that reigns in the cosmos; the spheric music. The metaphysical, that is to say, the original principles that constitute existence are the well-known triplets: (i) the superior: Sat, Chit, Ananda; and (ii) the inferior: Body, Life and Mind—this being a reflection or translation or concretisation of the former. We can see also here how the dual principle comes in, the twin godhead or the two gods to which Yajnavalkya refers. The same principle is found in the conception of Ardhanari-

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shwara, Male and Female, Purusha-Prakriti. The Upanishad says¹ yet again that the One original Purusha was not pleased at being alone, so for a companion he created out of himself the original Female. The dual principle signifies creation, the manifesting activity of the Reality. But what is this one and a half to which Yajñavalkya refers? It simply means that *the other*, created out of the one is not a wholly separate, independent entity: it is not an integer by itself, as in the Manichean system, but that it is a portion, a fraction of the One. And in the end, in the ultimate analysis, or rather synthesis, there is but one single undivided and indivisible unity. The thousands and hundreds, very often mentioned also in the R̥gveda, are not simply multiplications of the One, a graphic description of its many-sidedness; it indicates also the absolute fullness, the complete completeness (*pūrṇasya pūrṇam*) of the Reality. It includes and comprehends all and is a rounded totality, a full circle. The hundred-gated and the thousand-pillared cities of which the ancient Rishis chanted are forma-

¹ *Bṛihadaranyaka* I.4.

tions and embodiments of consciousness human and divine, are realities whole and entire englobing all the layers and grades of consciousness.

Besides this metaphysics there is also an occult aspect in numerology of which Pythagoras was a well-known adept and in which the Vedic Rishis too seem to take special delight. The multiplication of numbers represents in a general way the principle of emanation. The One has divided and subdivided itself, but not in a haphazard way : it is not like the chaotic pulverisation of a piece of stone by hammer blows. The process of division and subdivision follows a pattern almost as neat and methodical as a genealogical tree. That is to say, the emanations form a hierarchy. At the top, the apex of the pyramid, stands the one supreme Godhead. That Godhead is bi-une in respect of manifestation—the Divine and his creative Power. This two-in-one reality may be considered, according to one view of creation, as dividing into three forms or aspects—the well-known Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra of Hindu mythology. These may be termed

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the first or primary emanations. Now, each one of them in its turn has its own emanations—the eleven Rudriyas are familiar. These are secondary and there are tertiary and other graded emanations—the last ones touch the earth and embody physico-vital forces. The lowest formations or beings can trace their origin to one or other of the primaries and their nature and function partake of or are an echo of their first ancestor.

Man, however, is an epitome of creation. He embraces and incarnates the entire gamut of consciousness and comprises in him all beings from the highest Divinity to the lowest jinn or elf. And yet each human being in his true personality is a lineal descendant of one or other typical aspect or original Personality of the one supreme Reality ; and his individual character is all the more pronounced and well-defined the more organised and developed is the being. The psychic being in man is thus a direct descent, an immediate emanation along a definite line of devolution of the supreme consciousness. We may now understand and explain easily why one chooses a particular Ishta, an ideal god,

what is the drive that pushes one to become a worshipper of Siva or Vishnu or any other deity. It is not any rational understanding, a weighing of pros and cons and then a resultant conclusion that leads one to choose a path of religion or spirituality. It is the soul's natural call to the God, the type of being and consciousness of which it is a spark, from which it has descended, it is the secret affinity—the spiritual blood relation as it were—that determines the choice and adherence. And it is this that we name Faith. And the exclusiveness and violence and bitterness which attend such adherence and which go by the name of partisanship, sectarianism, fanaticism etc., are a deformation in the ignorance on the physico-vital plane of the secret loyalty to one's source and origin. Of course, the pattern or law is not so simple and rigid, but it gives a token or typical pattern. For it must not be forgotten that the supreme source or the original origin is one and indivisible and in the highest integration consciousness is global and not exclusive. And the human being that attains such a status is not bound or wholly limited to one particular

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formation: its personality is based on the truth of impersonality. And yet the two can go together: an individual can be impersonal in consciousness and yet personal in becoming and true to type.

The number of gods depends on the level of consciousness on which we stand. On this material plane there are as many gods as there are bodies or individual forms (adhar). And on the supreme height there is only one God without a second. In between there are gradations of types and sub-types whose number and function vary according to the aspect of consciousness that reveals itself.

LX

NACHIKETAS' THREE BOONS

The three boons asked for by Nachiketas from Yama, Lord of Death, and granted to him have been interpreted in different ways. Here is one more attempt in the direction.*

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Nachiketas is the young aspiring human being still in the Ignorance—*naciketa*, meaning one without consciousness or knowledge. The three boons he asks for are in reference to the three fundamental modes of being and consciousness that are at the very basis, forming, as it were, the ground-plan of the integral reality. They are (i) the individual, (ii) the universal or cosmic and (iii) the transcendental.

The first boon regards the individual, that is to say, the individual identity and integrity. It asks for the maintenance of that individuality so that it may be saved from the dissolution that Death brings about. Death, of course, means the dissolution of the body, but it represents also dissolution pure and simple. Indeed death is a process which does not stop with the physical phenomenon; but continues even after; for with the body gone, the other elements of the individual organism, the vital and the mental too gradually fall off, fade and dissolve. Nachiketas wishes to secure from Death the safety and preservation of the earthly personality, the particular organisation of mind and vital

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based upon a recognisable physical frame. That is the first necessity for the aspiring mortal—for, it is said, the body is the first instrument for the working out of one's life ideal. But man's true personality, the real individuality lies beyond, beyond the body, beyond the life, beyond the mind, beyond the triple region that Death lords it over. That is the divine world, the Heaven of the immortals, beyond death and beyond sorrow and grief. It is the hearth secreted in the inner heart where burns the Divine Fire, the God of Life Everlasting. And this is the nodus that binds together the threefold status of the manifested existence, the body, the life and the mind. This triplicity is the structure of name and form built out of the bricks of experience, the kiln, as it were, within which burns the Divine Agni, man's true soul. This soul can be reached only when one exceeds the bounds and limitations of the triple cord and experiences one's communion and identity with all souls and all existence. Agni is the secret divinity within, within the individual and within the world; he is the Immanent Divine, the cosmic godhead

that holds together and marshalls all the elements and components, all the principles that make up the manifest universe. He it is that has entered into the world and created facets of his own reality in multiple forms: and it is he that lies secret in the human being as the immortal soul through all its adventure of life and death in the series of incarnations in terrestrial evolution. The adoration and realisation of this Immanent Divinity, the worship of Agni taught by Yama in the second boon, consists in the triple sacrifice, the triple work, the triple union in the triple status of the physical, the vital and the mental consciousness, the mastery of which leads one to the other shore, the abode of perennial existence where the human soul enjoys its eternity and unending continuity in cosmic life. Therefore, Agni, the master of the psychic being, is called *jātavedas*, he who knows the births, all the transmigrations from life to life.

The third boon is the secret of secrets, for it is the knowledge and realisation of Transcendence that is sought here. Beyond the individual lies the universal; is there

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anything beyond the universal? The release of the individual into the cosmic existence gives him the griefless life eternal: can the cosmos be rolled up and flung into something beyond? What would be the nature of that thing? What is there outside creation, outside manifestation, outside Maya, to use a latter-day term? Is there existence or non-existence (utter dissolution or extinction—Death in his supreme and absolute status)? King Yama did not choose to answer immediately and even endeavoured to dissuade Nachiketas from pursuing the question over which people were confounded, as he said. Evidently it was a much discussed problem in those days. Buddha was asked the same question and he evaded it, saying that the pragmatic man should attend to practical and immediate realities and not waste time and energy in discussing things ultimate and beyond that have hardly any relation to the present and the actual.

But Yama did answer and unveil the mystery and impart the supreme secret knowledge—the knowledge of the Transcendent Brahman: it is out of the transcendent reality that the immanent deity takes his birth:

Hence the Divine Fire, the Lord of creation and the Inner Master—*sarvabhūtāntarātmā*, *antaryāmī*—is called *brahmajam*, born of the Brahman. Yama teaches the process of transcendence. Apart from the knowledge and experience first of the individual and then of the cosmic Brahman, there is a definite line along which the human consciousness (or unconsciousness, as it is at present) is to ascend and evolve. The first step is to learn to distinguish between the Good and the Pleasurable (*śreya* and *preya*). The line of pleasure leads to the external, the superficial, the false: while the other path leads towards the inner and the higher truth. So the second step is the gradual withdrawal of the consciousness from the physical and the sensual and even the mental preoccupation and focusing it upon what is certain and permanent. In the midst of the death-ridden consciousness—in the heart of all that is unstable and fleeting—one has to look for Agni, the eternal godhead, the immortal in mortality, the Timeless in time through whom lies the passage to Immortality beyond Time.

Man has two souls corresponding to his

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double status. In the inferior, the soul looks downward and is involved in the current of Impermanence and Ignorance, it tastes of grief and sorrow and suffers death and dissolution: in the higher it looks upward and communes and joins with the Eternal (the cosmic) and then with the Absolute (the transcendent). The lower is a reflection of the higher, the higher comes down in a diminished and hence tarnished light. The message is that of deliverance, the deliverance and reintegration of the lower soul out of its bondage of worldly ignorant life into the freedom and immortality first of its higher and then of its highest status. It is true, however, that the Upanishad does not make a trenchant distinction between the cosmic and the transcendent and often it speaks of both in the same breath, as it were. For in fact they are realities involved in each other and interwoven. Indeed the triple status, including the Individual, forms one single totality and the three do not exclude or cancel each other; on the contrary, they combine and may be said to enhance each other's reality. The Transcendence expresses or deploys itself

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in the cosmos—he goes abroad, *sa paryagāt*: and the cosmic individualises, concretises itself in the particular and the personal. The one single spiritual reality holds itself, aspects itself in a threefold manner.

The teaching of Yama in brief may be said to be the gospel of immortality and it consists of the knowledge of triple immortality. And who else can be the best teacher of immortality than Death himself, as Nachiketas pointedly said? The first immortality is that of the physical existence and consciousness, the preservation of the personal identity, the individual name and form—this being in itself an expression and embodiment and instrument of the Inner Reality. This inner reality enshrines the second immortality—the eternity and continuity of the soul's life through its incarnations in time, the divine Agni lit for ever and ever growing in flaming consciousness. And the third and final immortality is in the being and consciousness beyond time, beyond all relativities, the absolute and self-existent delight.

IV

The Beautiful in the Upanishads

When the Rigveda says

*idam śreṣṭham jyotiṣām jyotiḥ āgāt
citraḥ praketo ajaniṣṭa vibhva*

“Lo! the supreme Light of lights is come, a
varied awakening is born, wide manifest”

*ruśadvatsā ruśatī śwetyāgāt
āraigu kṛṣṇā sadanūnyasyāḥ*

“The white Mother comes reddening with
the ruddy child ; the dark Mother opens
wide her chambers”,

the feeling and the expression of the beautiful raise no questioning ; they are authentic as well as evident. All will recognise at once that we have here beautiful things said in a beautiful way. No less authentic however is the sense of the beautiful that underlies these Upanishadic lines :

*na tatra sūryo bhāti na candratārakam
nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto'yam agniḥ
tameva bhāntam anubhāti sarvam
tasya bhāsā sarvam idam vibhāti—*

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“There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars ; these lightnings too there shine not ; how then this fire ! That shines and therefore all shine in its wake ; by the sheen of That, all this shines.”

Only, to some perhaps the beauty may not appear as evident and apparent. The Spirit of beauty that resides in the Upanishadic consciousness is more retiring and reticent. It dwells in its own privacy, in its own home, as it were, and therefore chooses to be bare and austere, simple and sheer. Beauty means usually the beauty of form, even if it be not always the decorative, ornamental and sumptuous form. The early Vedas aimed at the perfect form (*surūpakṛtnum*), the faultless expression, the integral and complete embodiment ; the gods they envisaged and invoked were gleaming powers carved out of harmony and beauty and figured close to our modes of apprehension (*'sūpāyanāḥ*). But the Upanishads came to lay stress upon what is beyond the form, what the eye cannot see nor the vision reflect :

*na sandṛśi tiṣṭhati rūpamasya
na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścanainam*

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“Its figure does not lie in the field of vision, none can see it with the eye.”

The form of a thing can be beautiful ; but the formless too has its beauty. Indeed, the beauty of the formless, that is to say, the very sum and substance, the ultimate essence, the soul of beauty—that is what suffuses, with in-gathered colour and enthusiasm, the realisation and poetic creation of the Upanishadic seer. All the forms that are scattered abroad in their myriad manifest beauty hold within themselves a secret Beauty and are reflected or projected out of it. This veiled Name of Beauty can be compared to nothing on the phenomenal hemisphere of Nature ; it has no adequate image or representation below :

na tasya pratimā asti—

it cannot be defined or figured in the terms of the phenomenal consciousness. In speaking of it, however, the Upanishads invariably and repeatedly refer to two attributes that characterise its fundamental nature. These two aspects have made such an impression upon the consciousness of the Upanishadic

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seer that his enthusiasm almost wholly plays about them and is centred on them. When he contemplates or communes with the Supreme Object, these seem to him to be the mark of its authenticity, the seal of its high status and the reason of all the charm and magic it possesses. The first aspect or attribute is that of light—the brilliance, the solar effulgence—*ravitulyarūpaḥ*—the bright, clear, shadowless Light of lights—*virajam śubhram jyotiṣām jyotiḥ*. The second aspect is that of delight, the bliss, the immortality inherent in that wide effulgence—*ānandarūpam amṛtam yad vibhāti*.

And what else is the true character, the soul of beauty than light and delight? "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." And a thing of joy is a thing of light. Joy is the radiance rippling over a thing of beauty. Beauty is always radiant: the charm, the loveliness of an object is but the glow of light that it emanates. And it would not be a very incorrect mensuration to measure the degree of beauty by the degree of light radiated. The diamond is not only a thing of value, but a thing of beauty also, because

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of the concentrated and undimmed light that it enshrines within itself. A dark, dull and dismal thing, devoid of interest and attraction becomes aesthetically precious and significant as soon as the artist presents it in terms of the values of light. The entire art of painting is nothing but the expression of beauty, in and through the modalities of light.

And where there is light, there is cheer and joy. *Rasamaya* and *jyotirmaya* are thus the two conjoint characteristics fundamental to the nature of the ultimate reality. Sometimes these two are named as the solar and the lunar aspect. The solar aspect refers obviously to the Light, that is to say, to the Truth; the lunar aspect refers to the *rasa* (Soma), to Immortality, to Beauty proper,—

*yatte suṣamam hṛdayam adhi candramasi śṛitam
tenāmṛtatvasyeśena*

“O Lord of Immortality! Thy heart of beauty that is sheltered in the moon”—or, as the Prasna Upanishad has it,

rayireva candramāḥ . . . mūrtireva rayiḥ

“The Moon means Delight . . . and Delight means the created form.”

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The perception of beauty in the Upanishadic consciousness is something elemental—of concentrated essence. It silhouettes the main contour, outlines the primordial gestures. Pregnant and pulsating with the burden of beauty, the *mantra* here reduces its external expression to a minimum. The body is bare and unadorned, and even in its nakedness, it has not the emphatic and vehement musculature of an athlete; rather it tends to be slim and slender and yet vibrant with the inner nervous vigour and glow. What can be more bare and brief and full to the brim of a self-gathered luminous energy than, for example :

*yat prāṇena na praṇīti yena prāṇaḥ
prāṇīyate tadeva brahma—*

“That which lives not by Life, but which makes Life live—That is Brahman.”

or, *nālpe sukhāsti bhūmaiva sukham . . . yo vai
bhūmā tadamṛtam atha yadālpam tanmartyam—*

“In the Little there lies no happiness, the Vast alone is the Happiness. The Vast is the immortality, the Little is the Mortality.”

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The rich and sensuous beauty luxuriating in high colour and ample decoration that one meets often in the creation of the earlier Vedic seers returned again, in a more chiselled and polished and stylised manner, in the classical poets. The Upanishads in this respect have a certain kinship with the early poets of the intervening age—Vyasa and Valmiki. *Upamā Kālidāsasya*—Kalidasa revels in figures and images; they are protusely heaped on one another and usually possess a complex and composite texture. Valmiki's images are simple and elemental, brief and instinct with a vast resonance, spare and full of power. The same brevity and simplicity, vibrant with an extraordinary power of evocation, are also characteristic of the Upanishad *mantra*. With Valmiki's

ākūśamiva duṣpāram—

“like the sky hard to cross over,”

or, *gatārcisamwānalam—*

“like a fire whose light of flame is gone,”

or, *tejasādityasamkūśaḥ kṣamayā pṛthivīsamah—*

“fiery as the burning sun, full of forbearance like the earth,”

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can be compared, in respect of vivid and graphic terseness and pointedness and suggestive reverberation, the Upanishadic

vrkṣa iva stabdho divi tiṣṭhatyekah—

“The One stands alone in the heaven motionless, like a tree against the sky,”

or, *śaravat tanmayo bhavet—*

“Be wholly fixed on That, like an arrow on its target,”

or again,

yathemā nadyaḥ syandamānāḥ samudrāyaṇāḥ—

“like these rivers that flowing journey towards the sea.”

Art at its highest tends to become also the simplest and the most unconventional; and it is then the highest art, precisely because it does not aim at being artistic. The aesthetic motive is totally absent in the Upanishads; the sense of beauty is there, but it is attendant upon and involved in a deeper strand of consciousness. That consciousness seeks consciousness itself, the fullness of consciousness, the awareness and possession of the Truth and Reality,—the one

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thing which, if known, gives the knowledge of all else. And this consciousness of the Truth is also Delight, the perfect Bliss, the Immortality where the whole universe resolves itself into its original state of *rasa*, that is to say, of essential and inalienable harmony and beauty.

V

A Vedic Conception of the Poet

‘*Kavi*’ is an invariable epithet of the gods. The Vedas mean by this attribute to bring out a most fundamental character, an inalienable *dharma* of the heavenly host. All the gods are poets ; and a human being can become a poet only in so far as he attains to the nature and status of a god. Who is then a *kavi* ? The Poet is he who by his poetic power raises forms of beauty in heaven—*kaviḥ kavitvā divi rūpam āsajat*.¹ Thus the essence of poetic power is to fashion divine Beauty, to reveal heavenly forms. What is this Heaven whose forms the Poet discovers and embodies ? Heaven—Dyaus—has a very definite connotation in the Veda. It means the luminous or divine Mind²—the mind purified of its obscurity and limitations, due to subjection to the external senses, thus opening to the higher Light, receiving and recording

¹ *Rig Veda*, X. 124. 7.

² “*The Secret of the Veda*” by Sri Aurobindo.

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faithfully the deeper and vaster movements and vibrations of the Truth, giving them a form, a perfect body of the right thought and the right word. Indra is the lord of this world and he can be approached only with an enkindled intelligence, *dīdhayā manīṣā*,¹ a faultless understanding, *sumedhā*.¹ He is the supreme Artisan of the poetic power, *Tashtā*¹, the maker of perfect forms, *surūpa kṛtnum*.² All the gods turn towards Indra and become gods and poets, attain their Great Names of Supreme Beauty³. Indra is also the master of the senses, *indriyas*, who are his hosts. It is through this mind and the senses that the poetic creation has to be manifested. The mind spreads out wide the Poet's weaving;⁴ the poet is the priest who calls down and works out the right thinking in the sacrificial labour of creation.⁵ But that creation is made in and through the inner mind and the inner senses that are alive to

¹ *Rig Veda* III. 38. 1.

² „ I. 4. 1.

³ „ III. 54. 17.

⁴ „ X. 5. 3

⁵ „ I. 151. 7.

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the subtle formation of a vaster knowledge.¹ The poet envisages the golden forms fashioned out of the very profundity of the consciousness.² For the substance, the material on which the Poet works, is Truth. The seat of the Truth the poets guard, they uphold the supreme secret Names.³ The poet has the expressive utterance, the creative word ; the poet is a poet by his poetic creation—the shape faultlessly wrought out that unveils and holds the Truth.⁴ The form of beauty is the body of the Truth.

The poet is a trinity in himself. A triune consciousness forms his personality. First of all, he is the Knower—the Seer of the Truth, *kavayah satyadraṣṭārah*. He has the direct vision, the luminous intelligence, the immediate perception.⁵ A subtle and profound and penetrating consciousness is his, *niṇyam*, *pracetas* ; his is the eye of the Sun, *sūrya caksuḥ*.⁶ He secures an increased

¹ *Rig Veda* IV. 16. 3.

² „ VIII. 8. 2.

³ „ X. 5. 2.

⁴ „ IX. 96. 17.

⁵ „ I. 71. 10¹; *kavim ketum*—VII. 6. 2-

⁶ „ IX. 10. 8-9.

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being through his effulgent understanding.¹ In the second place, the Poet is not only Seer but Doer; he is knower as well as creator. He has a dynamic knowledge and his vision itself is power, *nṛcakṣāḥ*;² he is the Seer-Will, *kavikratuh*.³ He has the blazing radiance of the Sun and is supremely potent in his self-luminousness.⁴ The Sun is the light and the energy of the Truth. Even like the Sun the Poet gives birth to the Truth, *sūrya satyasava, satyāya satyaprasavāya*. But the Poet as Power is not only the revealer or creator, *savitā*, he is also the builder or fashioner, *taṣṭā*, and he is the organiser, *vedhāḥ*, of the Truth.⁵ As Savita he manifests the Truth, as Tashta he gives a perfected body and form to the Truth, and as Vedha he maintains the Truth in its dynamic working. The effective marshalling and organisation of the Truth is what is called Ritam, the Right; it is also called Dharma,⁶ the Law or the Rhythm, the

¹ *Rig Veda VIII. 44.12.*

² " " *III. 54.6.*

³ " " *I. 1. 5.*

⁴ " " *VII. 59.11.*

⁵ " " *V. 52.13.*

⁶ " " *III. 38.2.*

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ordered movement and invincible execution of the Truth. The Poet pursues the Path of the Right;¹ it is he who lays out the Path for the march of the Truth, the progress of the Sacrifice.² He is like a fast steed well-yoked, pressing forward;³ he is the charger that moves straight and unswerving and carries us beyond⁴—into the world of felicity.

Indeed delight is the third and the supremely intimate element of the poetic personality. Dear and delightful is the poet, dear and delightful his works, *priya*, *priyāṇi*. His hand is dripping with sweetness, *kavir hi madhuhastyah*.⁵ The Poet-God shines in his pristine beauty and is showering delight.⁶ He is filled with utter ecstasy so that he may rise to the very source of the luminous Energy.⁷ Pure is the Divine Joy and it enters and purifies all forms as it moves to the seat

¹ *Rig Veda VIII. 8. 23.*

² *Taittiriya Samhita, III. 55. 3.*

³ *Rig Veda III. 38. 1.*

⁴ „ „ *IV. 16. 11.*

⁵ „ „ *V. 5. 2.*

⁶ „ „ *IX. 25. 2.*

⁷ „ „ *IX. 25. 6.*

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of the Immortals.¹ Indeed this sparkling Delight is the Poet-Seer and it is that that brings forth the creative word, the utterance of Indra.²

The solar vision of the Poet encompasses in its might the wide Earth and Heaven, fuses them in supreme Delight in the womb of the Truth.³ The Earth is lifted up and given in marriage to Heaven in the home of Truth, for the creation and expression of the Truth in its varied beauty, *cāru citram*.

The Poet creates forms of beauty in Heaven; but these forms are not made out of the void. It is the Earth that is raised to Heaven and transmuted into divine truth-forms. The union of Earth and Heaven is the source of the Joy, the Ananda, that the Poet unseals and distributes. Heaven and Earth join and meet in the world of Delight; between them they press out Soma, the drink of the gods.

The Mind and the Body are held together by means of the Life, the mid-world. The

¹ *Rig Veda* IX. 25. 4.

² „ „ IX. 25. 5.

³ „ „ III. 54. 6.

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Divine Mind by raising the body consciousness into itself gathers up too, by that act, the delight of life and releases the fountain of immortal Bliss. That is the work and achievement of the gods as poets.

“Where then is the birth of the Poets? Ask it of the Masters. The Poets have seized and mastered the Mind, they have the perfect working and they fashion the Heaven.

“On this Earth they hold everywhere in themselves all the secrets. They make Earth and Heaven move together, so that they may realise their heroic strength. They measure them with their rhythmic measurements, they hold in their controlled grasp the vast and great twins, and unite them and establish between them the mid-world of Delight for the perfect poise.”¹

All the gods are poets—their forms are perfect, *surūpa*, *sudṛśa*, their Names full of beauty, *cāru devasya nāma*.² This means also that the gods embody the different powers that constitute the poetic consciousness. Agni is the Seer-Will, the creative

¹ *Rig Veda* III. 38. 2, 3.

² „ „ I. 24. I.

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vision of the Poet—the luminous energy born of an experience by identity with the Truth. Indra is the Idea-Form, the architectonic conception of the work or achievement. Mitra and Varuna are the large harmony, the vast cadence and sweep of movement. The Aswins, the Divine Riders, represent the intense zest of well-yoked Life-Energy. Soma is Rasa, Ananda, the Supreme Bliss and Delight.

The Vedic Poet is doubtless the poet of Life, the architect of Divinity in man, of Heaven upon earth. But what is true of Life is fundamentally true of Art too—at least true of the Art as it was conceived by the ancient seers and as it found expression at their hands.¹

¹ The Vedic term *Kavi* means literally 'a seer', 'one who has the vision', as the word 'poet' means etymologically 'a doer', 'a creator'. I have combined the two senses to equate the terms and bring out the meaning involved in their more current acceptance.

